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CEREBUS mothers & daughters

37



187
OCT

NOTE • FROM • THE PRESIDENT

A letter came in from D. Malachi Penney which raised some interesting points about starting to self-publish that I would like to address in this space — especially copyrighting, trademarking and the paperwork necessary to start your own business. Please bear in mind that the views expressed here are my own and (as usual) run contrary to all civilised thought dating back to the Magna Charta.

Steve Bissette went through the whole process of copyrighting and trademarking *Tyrant*. Any good copyright attorney can accomplish this for you. You pay them a few hundred dollars and they do a 'title search' (or somesuch) which tells them whether anyone has any previous claim to the name that you're trying to copyright and trademark. We sent Steve, at his request, a copy of the *Cerebus* issue that had the jam drawing of Cerebus and Tyrant, which he included with the ashecan of #1, fulfilling the requirements of 'intent to publish' and, in a matter of a few weeks, he had the paperwork that gave him clear title to *Tyrant*. Marvel released an individual book of some kind called 'Tyrant' shortly thereafter. Steve made a phone call to his attorney, found out that they hadn't even attempted to file a claim, so Steve was safe. (Wisely) he has no intention of taking legal action against them, but he is covered.

My *personal* view, relative to self-publishing, is that the only way to protect ownership of your character is to keep doing your character on a regular basis, establish your character, and thus render meaningless any attempt by anyone to take it away. I remember telling this to some smart-ass at a con last year: anyone is welcome to do *Cerebus* without fear of legal reprisal. As a comic-book character, that is. If they think they can do a better job of it than I can, I'll be happy to see the results. Well, this asshole immediately starts making plans to do a *Cerebus* and Jaka pornographic 'wedding night' comic book and runs around the con telling everyone. Does that bother me? No. All he accomplished was to make himself look both parasitical and ridiculous. If the comic book ever comes out, his name and the name of the 'project' will become synonymous with pointless and (having seen samples of his work) talentless vulgarity. When *Alf* first came out, I had a number of people advocating that I take some sort of legal action. There were similarities, but the two things are so widely different that any suit I would bring would be of the nuisance variety — a parasite looking for a payoff. In a karmic sense, someone who has a character that looks like Groucho Marx and who makes free use of any 'Roach Fodder' he finds lying about would only be asking for trouble. Glass houses and all that.

Don't sign any contracts and be productive and all legal vulnerabilities become a moot point. That's my personal bottom line.

On the subject of starting a business, if you're just launching your book you're far better off treating it as a 'hobby for profit'. The tax office has forms to cover 'self-employed earnings', which anyone who is self-publishing (even mini-comics guys) should have. It's usually just one page (unlikely but true) with a line for all of the different expenses incurred by your 'business'. If you've paid a two-thousand-dollar printing bill, two hundred dollars in postage, forty bucks for stationery, if twenty per cent of your living space is taken up with your drawing board, reference materials, etc., guess what, gang? You can write it off on your taxes. If all you've 'made' from self-publishing for the year is a few hundred dollars, your business suffered a 'loss' and the IRS and Revenue Canada and Inland Revenue give you a break because of it. You might even get a nice tax refund out of it.

Each jurisdiction (state, county, municipality) has different rules about how you become a business. When you pick up the tax form, ask about it. Explain that you're working at home, that you're suffering a loss or making a negligible profit, and they'll be able to tell you what office (if any) to contact about registering and/or getting a license. Or they might tell you that you don't have to do anything until you make 'x' number of dollars a year. Zoning requirements (i.e., not conducting business in a residential area) usually only apply to 'walk-in' trade, so don't let that stop you from going in and finding out what the local rules are. They aren't going to tell you you can't write and draw in your own home (unless your name is Michael Diana and you're living in the People's Republic of Florida).

Thanks, Mr. Penney. Needed to be said.

CEREBUS

NO. 187

OCTOBER 1994

DAVE SIM
President

GERHARD
Vice President

LINDA BERZINS
Typesetting

MOTHERS
&
DAUGHTERS
a novel

BOOK ONE
(Cerebus 151 to
Cerebus 162)
Flight

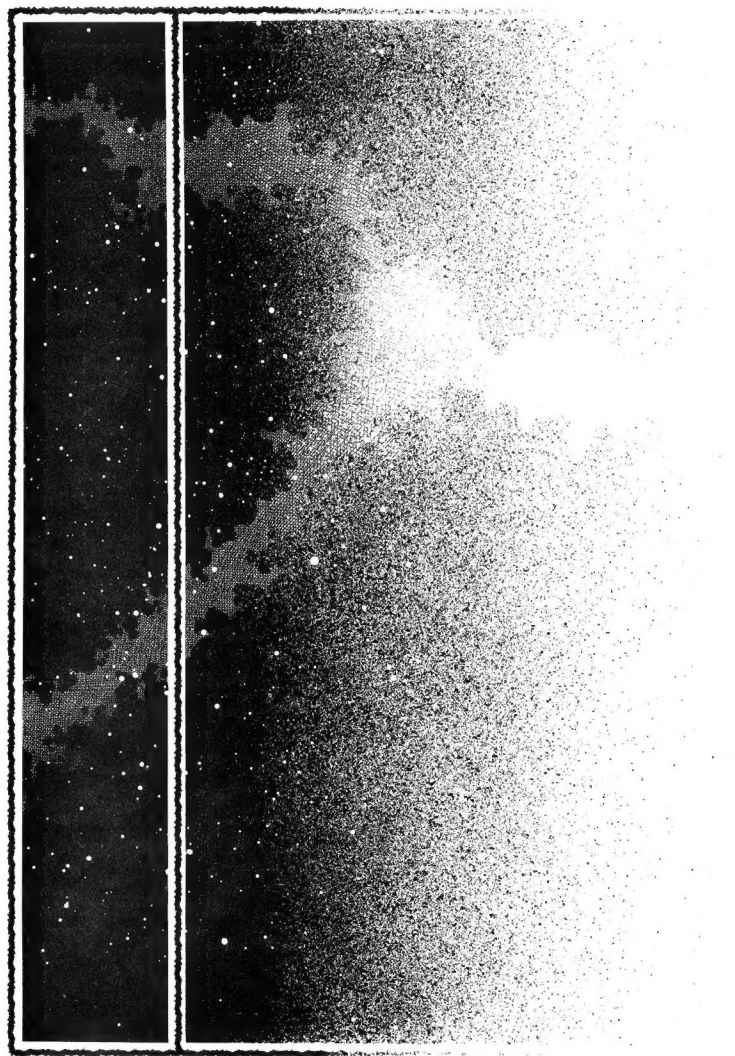
BOOK TWO
(Cerebus 163 to
Cerebus 174)
Women

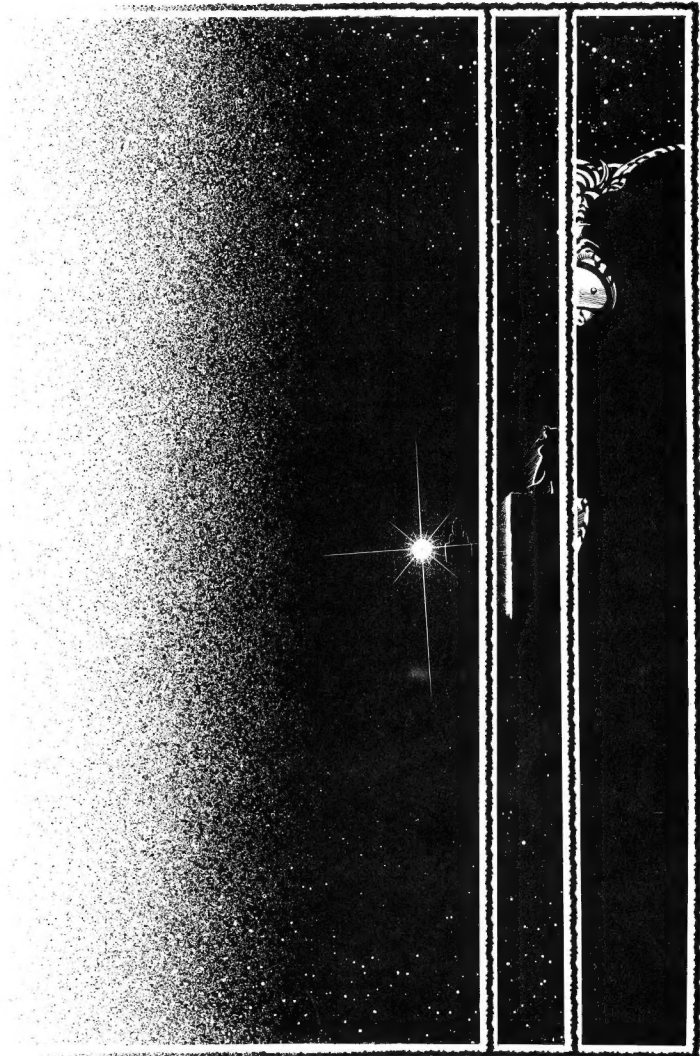
BOOK THREE
(Cerebus 175 to
Cerebus 186)
Reads

BOOK FOUR
(Cerebus 187 to
Cerebus 200)
Minds

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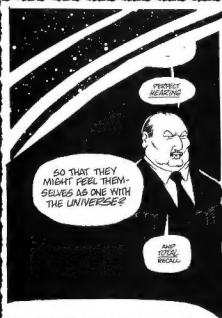
book four
minds



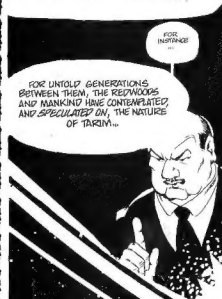








NTENS TO THE FIRST-- THANK GOD HE'S
WANE TODAY-- BEGAN HIS MILITARY CAREER
TING YOUNG BOYS BARELY OUT OF ADOLESCENCE
THE HARSHTEST IMAGINABLE TRAINING
GRAM TWENTY MILES WITHIN THE DISPUTED
BOUNDARIES OF THE RED MARCHES...





YOU'VE NEVER EVEN
HEARD
OF BELINUS
TWO-TONGUES --

**HAVE
YOU?**



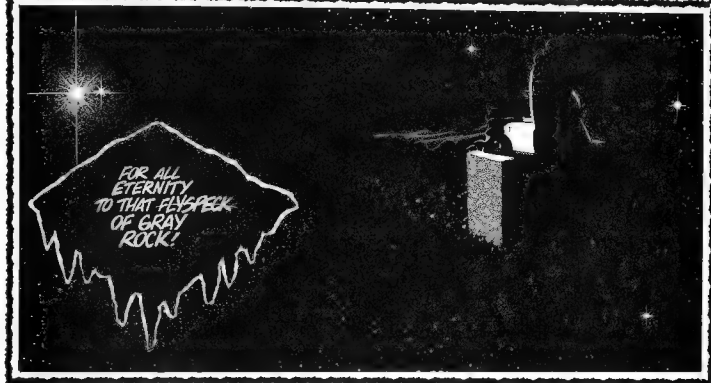
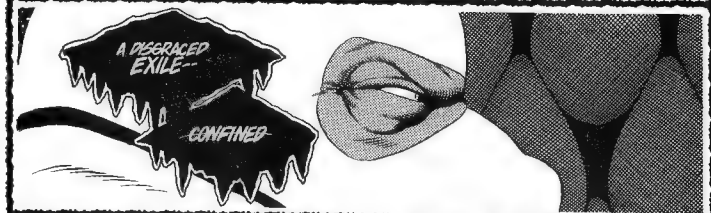
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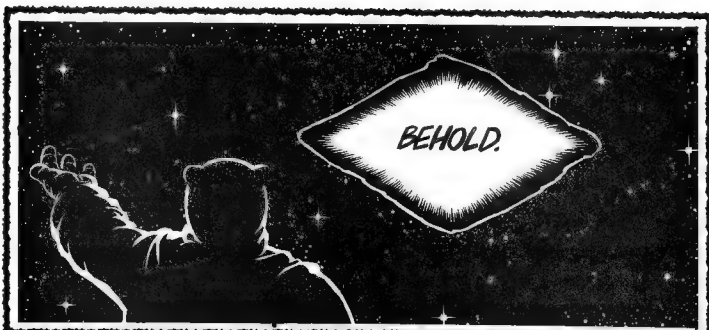
I DIDN'T
THINK
SO.

HE IS THE MALE DEITY--
THE ONE YOU CALL 'TARINI'.
IN ANCIENT TIMES HE ATTEMPTED
TO USURP THE THRONE OF
THE LIVING GODDESS--

AND WAS
BANISHED FOREVER
TO THE FURTHEST
EDGE OF HER
CELESTIAL
DOMAIN...



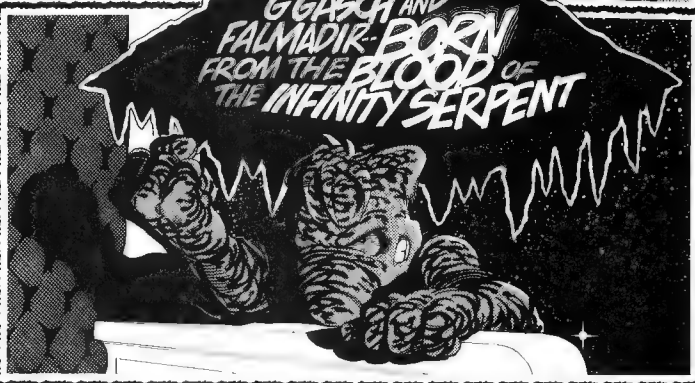




TARIM
IS GOING TO...
**BITE YOUR
THROAT**
AND
UH



FEED THEM
TO HIS PET
WOLVES





"FAMLAQUIR"
IS THE CORRECT
PRONUNCIATION.

YOU'RE CONFUSING
THE ELEMENTAL MYTHS
OF BOREALA WITH THE
SOUTHERN ORTHODOXIES

G'GASCH AND
FAMLAQUIR ARE
PART OF THE CLOVIS
TRADITION

~~CLOVIS~~

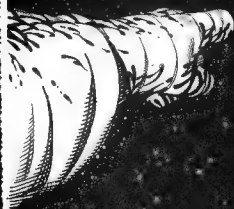
NOT
TARIM

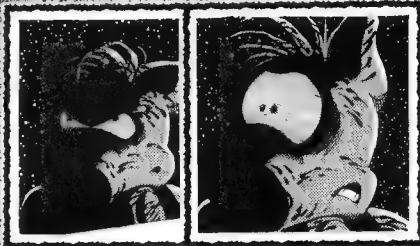


YOU CAN'T BE **SERIOUS**.
CLOVIS IS A CONSTRUCT OF
TARIMITE MISSIONARIES -- A
MERGING OF THE BOREALAN
THUNDER-GOD BAAN, AND THE
TARIMITE STAR-SON
MYTHOLOGY...



OH, **YEAH?** WELL, WHY
DON'T YOU **TELL** HIM THAT
WHILE HE'S WINDING YOUR
ENTRAILS AROUND THE
WHEELS OF HIS WAR
CHARIOT?!



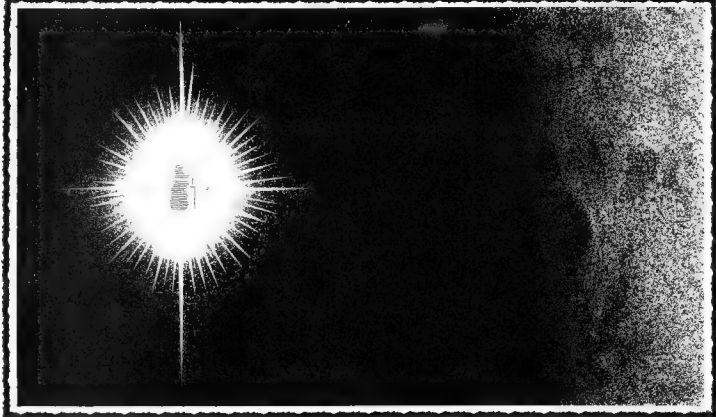
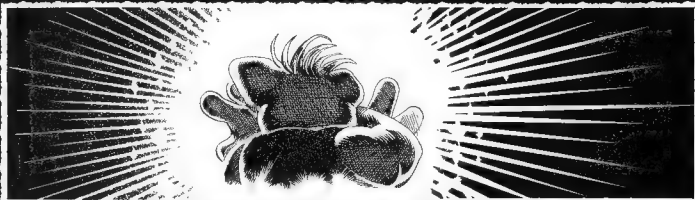
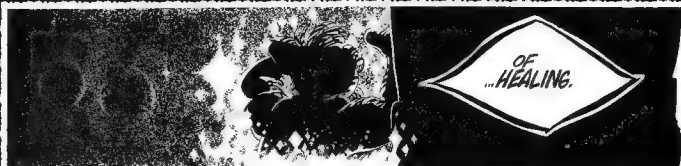
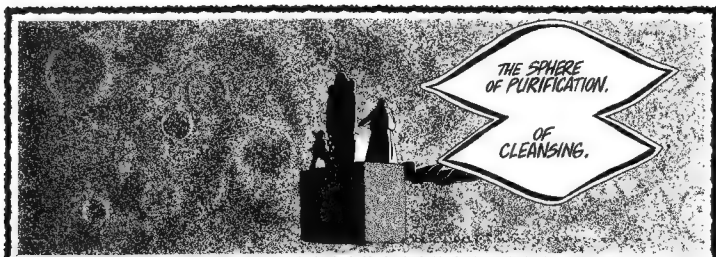


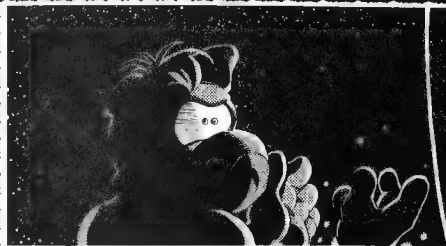
BEHOLD!

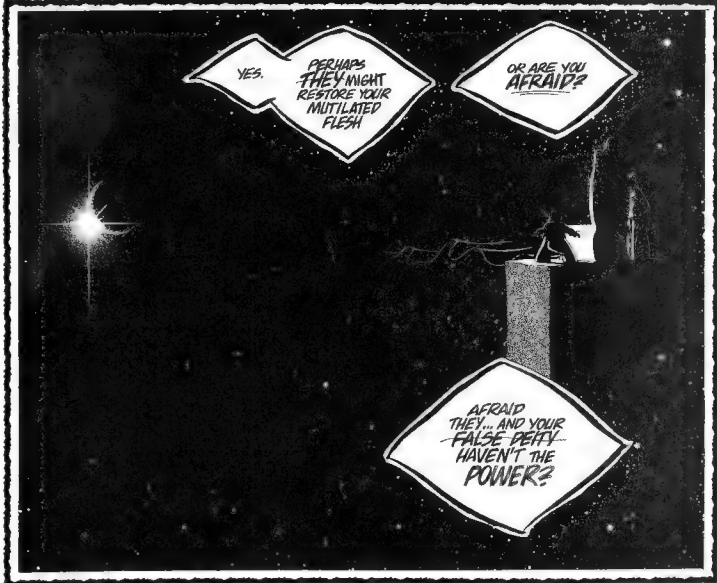
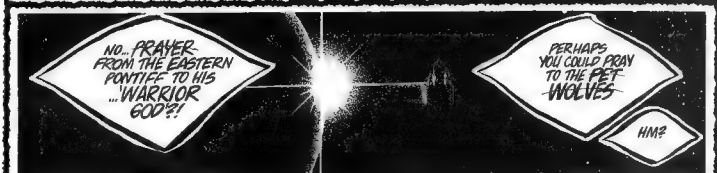
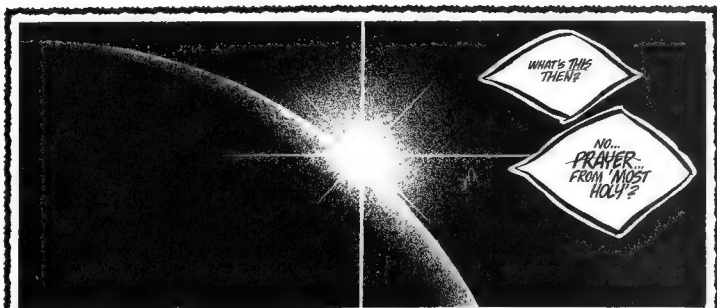
THE CRIMSON
SPHERE! GATEWAY
TO OUR LADY'S INNER
REALM- RED WITH THE
BLOOD OF EVERY
BIRTH WHICH EVER
WAS--OR EVER
WILL BE!

SCORED
BY GREEN
BIRTH CANALS,
SYMBOLIC OF
THE BIRTH AND
REBIRTH OF
ALL LIFE!









AARDVARK COMMENT

P.O. BOX 1674, STATION 'C', KITCHENER, ONTARIO N2G 4R2

The final instalment of *Reads* still hasn't shipped as of this writing (25 August), but I have an unusually large stockpile of letters to pick from — mostly owing to the accelerated schedule of production (fewer story pages and most of the text having been composed, if not written, some years ago). I try to print as many critical letters as I can, which often conflicts with my desire to make Aardvark Comment reflect the nature of the mail as much as possible. This time out I decided to print a majority (five) of the negative mail (seven anti-*Reads* letters out of a couple of hundred). I'm not going to answer them since, obviously, I don't agree with the viewpoints. I don't think there's much to be gained by defending your personal tastes and sensibilities, and it's a little too easy to have the 'last word'. So all of the letters on the War of the Genders have been bumped. Sorry, Gender War Fans. Now, for all of you who really think Dave Sim Should Be Taken Down a Peg or Five (and who can't get enough 'Reads Bashing' on the Computer Nets), have I got some treats for you:

Dear Mr. Sim,

So, this is a "graphic novel", eh? A friend recommended *Cerebus* and I was sceptical. I prefer reading and using my own imagination, to wrestle with symbolism, form and structure in the strange attractor in my skull instead of having it laid out in front of me. Still, I like art in many forms and was willing to give it a try.

It's a comic book, folks. Forget this pretentious "graphic novel" bullshit; this does not rate a place on the shelf next to Kafka, Meyrink, Cave, Heller, Shakespeare, Conrad or William Burroughs. It doesn't rate next to my old SF and fantasy novels and authors, like Iain Banks, William

Gibson and C.J. Cherryth.

Symbolism? What can one say about a guy who has armies of fat, ugly, stereotyped feminists (Cirinists) oppressing defenceless men while the exotic dancer is portrayed as beautiful, loving and honest (Jaka)? The flaying of Oprah and the appearance of Margaret Thatcher were so obvious as to be tedious.

I noticed in the "Endgame" wank you had that you said that you were borderline schizophrenic and that Estarcion *had* to be real to you. If you are so dedicated to creating the suspension of disbelief, why did you wipe your arse with it in that issue in a very poor imitation of Sam Delany's third Neveryon book?

How 'real' can Estarcion be? Iest is a city on top of a tower of demon 'eads an' skuwws. Fairly crude symbolism, but totally impractical. How are food and materials transported? With enormous unprofitable expenditure of profitable energy. The premise is ludicrous.

Some minimal research may not go astray. If *Church & State* was meant to lampoon the Catholic church, you were well wide of the mark, perpetuating such myths as your (and many people's) perception of papal infallibility. Is it asking too much that you had one idle chat to a priest or looked at one authoritative text on church structure? The whole Tarim/Terim thing is so pointless it verges on being just silly. If these are the brilliant ideas you get "out there in the darkness", perhaps you should trot out a few mundane ones or turn on the light. Making up a lie (or using an old one) and then making fun of it is hardly biting wit.

This is a comic book, folks. The main character is a talking aardvark. Art this is not. At best, it is sporadically entertaining (I love the dead pigeons joke) and a

bit of fun. The fun decreases as the issue number increases and your pretensions take over the story. Perhaps it is a damning critique of the comics industry. How would I know and why would I care?

The standard of drawing is magnificent. The stained glass window is my favourite. I enjoy the way you play with panels and page structure. Reading your prose, however, is like wading through sewage (mud wasn't powerful enough, sorry) and about as rewarding. I cannot believe how shallow your thinking is. Storytellers and non-storytellers? You are off on a wild tangent about the "where do you get your ideas?" question that I, for one, found quite insulting. Also, try reading some basic popular physics texts to get it through your thick fucking skull that observation affects, and is intrinsic to, reality. Not a neutral act at all.

Besides your ideas being superficial, the style is soporifically vapid. Seriously, I recommend you read a lot more stuff like Hunter Thompson and P.J. O'Rourke (classics would only increase the pretensions) before you inflict another eight hundred and fifty-seven pages of terminal misery upon your readers. It was a chore to get through, only to find a mind that thinks the "issue 200" scam is clever writing, that is impressed by "Don't read this" and similar childish tricks. I read through with grim determination then used *Jaka's Story* to light the barbecue.

Comics have a long way to go before maturity. The Marvel and DC world is definitely pre-pubescent. This rates pubescent, but not by much. It is only barely past "Look what I can do, ma!" Maybe in ten years or so I'll check out what's happening again. Maybe not.

I have already wasted more effort than I intended on this comic. Stick with this facile drivel if you want to, my new Einstürzende Neubauten album is begging to be played. Now that is art, souls aflame in the endless night, burning directly into the mind and leaving permanent scars. If you think you are out there in the darkness, try watching the Halber Mensch video sometime.

Brendan Funnell
Canberra, Australia

P.S. I really did set fire to *Jaka's Story*. Ripped it to bits and stuffed it deep in the coals of the Webber.

It may have been worth a few bucks at a second-hand book store (hi, Alice!), but the satisfaction gleaned was more valuable. I can still say with pride that I would never burn a novel, nor ever have.

P.P.S. I threw in the line about profits because business terms seem to send you batty. After having my intelligence insulted, I thought it only fit to return the favour.

P.P.P.S. I was lying about *Jaka's Story*, or don't you trust me? Infatigable, is it not? Playing puerile games with your readers because you are bored is indicative of a meagre talent, and I am being charitable concerning your motivation. You actually seem to think you are clever. I won't be seeing you at #200, so forget about #300.

★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

Jesus, Dave! What the hell?! After reading your response to Lon Levy's letter a few issues back, I was shocked. Here was somebody, clearly enamored of your work, offering their opinions on what worked and what didn't, yet your response was basically "Fuck off. The letters page is for morons whose girlfriends dumped them and consequently blame society for their shortcomings." I planned to write a letter about it, but never found the time.

And there it might have ended. But lo! In 184 appears the letter I was going to write, penned by John Wright, who, with reasonable diplomacy, wonders why you have a letters page if not to hear the opinions of your (mostly) faithful readers. And he gets the same response, complete with a bizarrely incongruous analogy. Dave, Mr. Wright didn't put an ad in the paper asking anyone interested to come by and tell him what they thought of his interior decorating; you did.

I, too, feel like *Cerebus* is becoming less and less interesting. I don't like your prose. You simply aren't able to reach whatever literary heights you're trying so desperately to ascend. What I do like is your artwork, your characters, and the themes surrounding them. The prose sections invariably take me out of the story, and this latest melding of your life with that of *Cerebus'* world is really dreadful.

There is my criticism. You've got a letters page, ostensibly for

comments on your work in progress, so you should expect the occasional unhappy reader. Do I think you'll change the way you write the book because of my opinion? Certainly not. Do I want you to change the book because of my opinion? Hardly. This is your creation, and I want it to unfold as you desire. But since you've supplied me with a forum, I thought I'd offer you some feedback, something to consider. How else to determine what people think of your work? For most creative endeavors, such as books, plays, films, etc., there are countless critics (plenty of whom, sadly, are hacks of the worst sort) to give the artist feedback, but in comics there really aren't any (or if there are, they are too far from the mainstream for me to have noticed; *Cerebus* is the only comic I buy, or read, for that matter). So besides monthly sales figures, letters to Aardvark Comment are all you've got.

Having said all that, my question is simply this: what do you want from the letters page?

I'll tell you what I want from it, from you, that is: on the infrequent occasions when people write in with actual questions or comments (as opposed to the Dear Abby letters which fill most of the space), how about responding to them intelligently? How about, in the instance of criticism, defending your artistic choices? And if you don't feel the need to defend anything (probably the case), how about letting those letters stand on their own instead of belittling those who would help you?

Dave, it seems obvious that you don't give a shit about what people think of your work or whether they buy it or not. And that's fine. Isn't that what any true artist believes? Yet by having a letters page, you're asking for opinions anyway.

Why?

Sincerely,

Sean McPharlin
Pasadena, CA

★★★★★★★★

Mister Dave Sim,

Before I write about the comic book proper, I'm going to make some comments about your rather specious reply, to John Wright's letter. Unlike the analogy you used in your reply 1) you make money either directly or indirectly from

money spent on buying issues of *Cerebus* (assuming that Mister Wright does not own stock or have part or total ownership of the airlines or taxi services you choose to patronize). 2) by offering issues of *Cerebus* for sale, you are implicitly offering it up for public consumption (Mister Wright does not necessarily have the public — general or otherwise — in mind when he designs his decor). 3) linking (1) and (2) and reiterating (1), you get money — directly or indirectly — when someone buys an issue of *Cerebus* (you don't mention paying Mister Wright anything to view his decor), and 4) you implicitly invite criticism by having the Aardvark Comment feature in issues of *Cerebus* (you explicitly state that Mister Wright does not invite criticism of his decor, since you state that you show up uninvited). I'm sure someone with more time and inclination could point out other lapses in the logic you use; I'm just pointing out the most obvious ones.

O.K., maybe I'm on shaky ground on (4): possibly the Aardvark Comment feature is merely an invitation for mindless praise and shameless exhibitionism. Well, drop the adjective if you like, but if that is what you want from your mail, at least be honest about it.

Anyway, I wonder a little why you've been playing down your strengths (the comic-book stuff) in favor of your weaknesses (the prose stuff). Just a little, though, since from other comments you've made it's obviously simply because you feel like it. It's a bit odd, though, for you to be championing the inherent strengths of comics and then be filling up *Cerebus* with all this prose. In fact, if it weren't for the few pages of comics in each issue, I would be skipping *Reads* altogether. So those few pages have been a pretty good marketing gimmick where I'm concerned.

The Victor Reid stories were self-indulgent. Again, I wonder a little that maybe you're leaving behind the readers from outside of comics fandom and boring the people who don't care about the business aspects of the industry. However, at least it had a straightforward narrative quality instead of all this fucking-around bullshit that is the Viktor Davis stories.

I can't force myself (and why try?) to read the prose sections in the last bunch of issues. It's not that I

hate this kind of thing. Nope, it's that you're doing a really bad job at it. (And, yes, of course, this is just my opinion. Whose opinion would it be when I'm writing this letter?) Then again, I'm sure you've gotten letters praising your writing from when you've printed speeches that you've given and I didn't like those speeches much either — though those speeches did have a coherent approach to facilitate the making of their points, which the Viktor Davis stuff is lacking. Lastly, on a completely personal note, I cannot stand where you have 'the reader' react in such and such a way, because I find it both presumptuous and false (in that it doesn't describe my reactions to the proceedings).

Looking forward to the end of *Reads* and this section of *Mothers and Daughters* so that you will either return to comics or turn completely to prose (so I can simply stop picking up *Cerebus* and getting up my hopes).

Eric Barnes
324 Capot Road
Virginia Beach, VA
USA 23462

P.S. Why can't you always be as funny as the back cover of #179? That Victor Reid quote that perfectly encapsulates Todd McFarlane (from what I can gather from his own words) sitting there in conjunction with that Todd McFarlane character. Here I thought this McFarlane character was supposed to be a villain. Here I thought your Victor Reid was supposed to be a negative example of what you shouldn't do artistically. Hilarious!

★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

I happened to notice your response to a letter from John Wright in Louisville, Kentucky. You were comparing his criticisms (after having spent a large amount of money collecting what you've done so far) to your flying to his city and cabbing over to his home so you could put down the decor.

I'm afraid you're way out of line with that way of thinking. You are offering to him (and me and others) a product for sale. Your 300-issue saga of *Cerebus* (and the people he meets along the way) is essentially what you make in hopes of us buying it. This implies you'll try to make it as high-quality as possible, on a consistent basis. Anything less would be a

disservice to us, your customers. Why can't someone complain if he or she feels the quality is poor?

Let me use the example of buying a new car. If the brakes went out five minutes after you drove it off the dealer's lot, wouldn't you have a right to go back and complain? If the dealership refused to fix the problem, wouldn't you feel you could keep complaining, all the way up to the automobile company's president, to get the car put right?

What you're saying to John amounts to telling us that you'll draw, write and print whatever suits your whim of the moment, without the slightest care about how your customers feel about it. Who cares, you imply, whether I write drivels or not? The schmucks out there are so stupid, they'll buy it anyway!

If you were just giving away copies of *Cerebus*, you *could* write and draw whatever you want, quality be damned. Since you're selling them, however, you should show the business sense of knowing that you have to turn out the best product you can. Otherwise, people will quit buying your comic and your company will eventually go under. Remember what started happening to the big-name comics companies when they started turning out garbage and acting like they didn't care if people bought it or not? They almost went under, only to be saved by their parent companies. You don't have that latter luxury, do you?

I also recall you stating a few years back, in an editorial about those very same comics companies, how you felt they were so cold and callous and didn't seem to give a damn about their readers, and how you despised such attitudes. Now it seems it's your turn, Dave. You have become what you hated most. Sincerely,

Richard Wm. Kurgas
4637A Gustine Terr.
St. Louis, MO
USA 63116

★★★★★★★★

Yo, Dave!

I finally read an issue of *Eightball* and you know what? It knocked my socks off! In fact, it kicks your LAZY ASS royally. I quote the inside back cover: "Sorry, yew all . . . no time for no letters this ish-she-w" — hah! I'm not wasting any more money on 8 pages of zilch and 30 pages of letters from whiny

morons. Whoever types them up for you puts more effort into *Cerebus* than you do (these days).

So when I go into a comics store, I'll pick up the latest *Cerebus*, easily read it in 1 minute, but ensure the copy is wrinkled and abused so that no one will want to buy it (like many former fans, I'm sure) — then I will purchase another delightful issue of *Eightball*!

Another dissatisfied customer,
Eustachia

★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

I should write this postscript while the event is still fresh in my mind. I just had a sort of upsetting conversation with a woman in the comics store I frequent for *Cerebus*. (It's called Fat Jack's at 20th & Sansom in Philly — free plug — they have a great selection of back issues and a nice phone-book display near the middle of the store.)

It's Wednesday, new arrival day, and I like to stop in to see what's new for the week. I saw this woman picking a copy of every new book off the stand, seemingly indiscriminately. This surprised me, because although I know people of all ages read all kinds of stuff (this woman looked about 45 or so), I had never seen anyone that much of a completist. I mean, she had just a huge pile of books. I was standing next to her, so I asked her something like, "Are you going to read all those, or is it like an investment?" She shot me an icy look and gave a monosyllabic reply, something like "I read 'm." I think I shrugged, I know I smiled, and I turned away to head towards the back-issue bins. I am currently trying to complete my collection of your books, and whenever I have a few extra bucks, I try to pick up some issues I don't have. Completism? For *Cerebus*, guilty as charged.

So, a few minutes later, *Cerebi* 54 & 55 in hand, I walked up to the cashier and wound up behind this lady. It's taking an inordinately long time to ring up her order, so I decided to strike up a conversation. I showed her my books and asked her if she had ever read them. She said, "I used to, but not anymore." I asked her "How could you stop?" I'm totally addicted." She said, "Ever since Dave's divorce he's become overly

misogynistic." Hmm, I thought. "So the books offend you?" I replied. "Yes. And also, to judge from the letters page, his fans seem sophomoric." Now, anybody who knows me would say that I am an overly sensitive person. My feelings get hurt pretty easily, so I guess I was being defensive when I replied, "How can you call *Cerebus* fans sophomoric compared to some of the stuff you've got there?" The cashier, apparently trying to defuse the situation, shouted, "Fight! Fight!" The woman says, "I'm just not used to some stranger coming up to me and insulting my choice of reading material." I say, "I wasn't insulting you. I was just asking a question." I guess I was insulting her, but she did it first. That makes it okay, right?

I suppose I was thrown because she was really the first person I've met that truly knew of your work and had what she thought were valid reasons for not liking it. Everyone up to that point had either never heard of it or really liked it.

I am a person that tends to focus on relatively unimportant issues and think about them a little too much. As for her points, she couldn't have been serious about the letters stuff or she certainly wouldn't have been buying all those Marvel and DC books. As for the misogynist charge, well, I could see how someone who hasn't read your stories in their entirety could be put off by Astoria and Jaka, your two most thoroughly developed female characters, being raped and beaten. But neither of these events were treated casually, and both had far-reaching repercussions in the story line. And, shit, these things happen to women something like every ten seconds here in the U.S.A.

Anyway, she left the store in a hurry, and I didn't get a chance to say anything else, which is most likely a good thing. If by chance you are reading this in print, angry woman: "I was just trying to be nice. There was no reason to act like an uptight, stuck-up bitch. Next time I'll just keep my mouth shut."

As I told you above, I tend to overanalyse things. I have come up with several possible explanations for this woman's behaviour.

A) This woman is a regular customer of the store, and every week buys a huge stack of new

comics. Spending 65-80 dollars on comic books consistently provokes people to ask stupid questions and she's sick of listening to them. She's decided being short and/or rude is the best way to get people to leave her alone.

B) This woman is clearly familiar with your work, and has read some of the letters. She thinks that, in general, most *Cerebus* fans feel that Marvel and DC publish crap. Therefore, she felt that my attempt to introduce her to *Cerebus* was in some way a veiled attempt to insult her taste in comics. Perhaps she is a bit paranoid that people might think she's dumb for reading comic books. I think anyone who uses the terms "misogynistic" and "sophomoric" in a 30-second conversation with a stranger is probably a bit too concerned with impressing that person with her fabulously diverse vocabulary.

C) She's a mean, rude person with limited social skills and no sense of humor.

In any case, this incident did depress me a bit. It seems to me that the simple fact that both of us were in a specialty store, participating in a hobby that we both obviously enjoy, would indicate that we have at least a little bit in common. Why can't we all just get along?

Well, one bad experience certainly won't deter me from continuing to tell as many people as I can about *Cerebus*. I'll take any opportunity I get to try to share the passion I feel and the joy that I receive from your work with as many people as possible.

Later, Dave,

Joby Treegoob

I thought this letter would make a nice transition from negative to positive. I wouldn't worry about it too much, Joby. Just different systems of belief. I think you tagged her a good one with the 'sophomoric' observation (I can just imagine what she had in that big ol' pile).

★★★★★★★★

Dave—

I work for a public radio station in Louisville, Kentucky. The job is best described as being long periods of tedium punctuated with frantic explosions of hecticity. Tonight it is slow.

I've been with *Cerebus* since #89. This is my first letter to the column, and I'd like to address a

couple of the readers who were published in #184.

First thing: Thelonius Monk originated the comment, "writing about music is like dancing about architecture." I've seen this quote misattributed to Steve Martin, Elvis Costello, and, most recently, Laurie Anderson. This bugs the hell out of me. Stop it.

This next bit is for fellow Louisvillian John Wright. John, really, can you even think of another artistic medium that allows for such a direct line of communication between the artist and the audience? Say you write Steven Spielberg a letter telling him that *Schindler's List* blew. Would you expect to see your letter up on the screen with a response before the credits of *The Flintstones*? The point being, we've got it good, quit your whining. Oh, by the way, Dave, if you do plan to fly down to Louisville anytime soon, be informed that the only way to get here via plane is to disguise yourself as a UPS package. Just a warning.

A general note to all the depressed youth who aren't getting it from the women they desire — learn how to walk the fuck away! If things aren't going how you want them to go, give up. Someone else who does want you will come along. By sticking around in an unhappy situation, you are wearing an enormous flashing 'walk on me, I'm pathetic' sign. Look, I know this firsthand. It's often hard not to fool yourself into thinking, 'She'll come around and decide I'm her one true love dog.' Chances are good that she won't. If that scenario were a possibility, there would be no room for doubt. Further, do not waste time by being shy about things. If you think you know how you feel about someone, tell her. In other words, don't be a schmuck.

I've run out of things to pontificate mightily about. This letter has been fun to write. I may do it again sometime.

Patrick Joseph
1327 Hepburn Ave., #2
Louisville, KY
USA 40203

You know, it does make a little more sense coming from Thelonius Monk than Steve Martin or Laurie Anderson, doesn't it? You heard the man, folks. Stop it.

★★★★★★★★

Dave,

Re #184, page 14:

"F'crying out loud, Vic, I'm reading *Cerebus* here!"

I just hates it when you does that.

Michael Mooney
Motorola University

Look, no more text pieces this issue. All better. All better.

★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

Ever since *Reads* began, the desire to write a letter has been gradually growing on me (a bit like a fungus, you could say). Reading *Cerebus* has always been a different experience than reading anything else, and in *Reads* I feel this difference about twice as strongly as I have in any of the previous books. While reading #184 I finally passed some critical point, and I just *have* to write a letter to define to myself exactly what this difference might be.

My pen pal asked what I've thought of *Cerebus* recently, and my answer was that "it's fucking with my head; how can I not like it?" There really is an odd pleasure to being manipulated as blatantly as you've been doing it the past few issues. First there was that vagina thing, then seeing *Cerebus'* ear cut off (it was a surprisingly wrenching moment, knowing that his profile would never again be the same for the next 100+ issues), leading to the climactic "revelation" in the last issue. The past year has been one shock after another, and it's put me in very unfamiliar waters as a reader. I'm not quite sure how to think about *Cerebus* anymore, and the book has gained an air of mystery that hasn't been there at least since I began reading (halfway through *Jaka's Story*; possibly I would have felt like this at the end of *Church & State*, but by the time I read the actual issues I already knew what to expect from the letters at the beginning of *Jaka's Story* — one of the perils of reading the story backwards).

The upshot of all this is that reading *Cerebus* lately has been like being sucked into an unknown world. Plunging into *Reads* (and especially the Viktor Davis sections) has almost felt like jumping headfirst into a pool. It's a cool, dark, quiet place, and only you and I are there. But there's more to the feeling than that. I'm

not really there, just this figure which you keep identifying with me, and you're not really there, just this Viktor Davis guy. I see and feel this other world, but I'm not completely there. Take the "revelation" last issue, for instance. When you said the series would end at 200, I didn't believe you for a moment. Fourteen years is a long time to spend on a joke, particularly one you would have had to work at pretty consistently as you spread the "300" lie around. On the other hand, just as you intended, I began to think, what if the series did end at 200, only 17 issues away? What if the final books were coming to an end, and I was only then finding out? The thought once again shifted around my ideas about the book, even if I didn't believe that the thought was true.

All the same, Viktor Davis does not have the last word on who has the power in the writer/reader relationship. Things are much stranger than he admits. Sure, the writer controls what's written, and the reader decides whether to read it or not, but there's more to the relationship than that. The "reader" might be identified with me, but it's not me, even if we were both slipping around at your "revelation". That's what I like about *Cerebus*; it has this ambiguous connection to "real life", the same sort of interaction that you described in Oscar Wilde's works during *Melmoth*. I can be both participant and spectator, "reader" and reader. I'm under your control and outside of it at the same time, and it's a pleasant sort of rush to get once a month. Then I can go back to my normal life and look forward to my next fix in thirty days' time.

And before I leave I just have to mention that two-page splash at the end of 184 — it's breathtaking. Gerhard doesn't get enough credit for the overall sense of mass in this comic. Grandeur just wouldn't be as grand without all those little lines to fill it out. I can't wait to see what's on schedule for next month.

Cheers,

Emilio Englade
629 E. Jefferson #1
Iowa City, IA
USA 52245

Thanks. Glad you like it.

★★★★★★★★

Dear Mr. Sim,

"This is something new. This is something precious."

I've thought that three times in reference to *Cerebus*. Once when I first discovered the book way back when (how many years has it been, anyway?). Once again at the conclusion of the *Church & State* story line, the point that I had, until now, considered to be the high watermark of your work.

Now, I'm thinking it again. The second half of *Reads* (up to issue 184 so far) has been the single most unique and fascinating reading experience I have ever had. Nothing has ever gotten to me like this, reached up off the page and pulled me through like this has.

This is most definitely something new.

You know, I had the opportunity to meet you once. During the U.S. Tour you stopped in Boston for a couple of days and did signings at a couple of stores that I frequent. I remember, at the time, wrestling with the idea of going to meet you and, ultimately, deciding not to.

Not because I didn't want to, though. I would have thrilled to exchange a few words with someone whose work I so admire, perhaps even ask you to sign one of the issues that were particularly meaningful to me.

No, I stayed away because I was afraid to affect that odd, tenuous relationship that exists between us. That of the artist to his audience. Even if it were something so simple as your voice not sounding the way that I imagine it does when I read your words in the book, I was afraid that it would alter the way I read future issues of *Cerebus*. So I left our "relationship" the way it was — creator to reader. The way I feel it should be.

The only "you" that I want to know is the one that you present in your work. Pure and simple.

Now I've been rewarded for my restraint. You've taken that strange relationship to a new level, a higher plane. You are crossing the ether between us, using your words to develop our relationship in a way that is rich and fascinating and very, very new. The essence of art, and of story-telling, is communication and you are capturing that in a way that is as unique and real as anything I've ever experienced.

You have brought back that sense of danger, Mr. Sim. That fragile, nervous unknowing that defines life, makes it as joyous and beautiful as it is terrifying and ugly. We don't *know* what lies in wait around the next corner. Anything can happen and all stories are true.

Now this relationship becomes about the future.

For you, it is the blank white page before you, clean, inviting and fearsome.

For me, it is the eagerly awaited and, as yet, unpublished issues of *Cerebus* and the words and images therein.

It's 2:29 A.M. on a warm summer Sunday. The music echoes softly and distantly through the unfocused shadow that lies beyond the brightness of the lamp before me and the air drifts inward in cool, hesitant waves.

I read your words with a seemingly heightened sense of awareness and they seem as real to me as anything. I hear the whispers. I smell the cigarette smoke. Everything is getting much closer now and I am awake.

I am dreaming

Yes, Mr. Sim, I *am* the reader.

Tell me your story.

Sincerely,

David Chenette
33 Randlett Street
Quincy, MA
USA 02170

No problem. Thanks.

★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

Cerebus 183 is the single best comic book I have *ever* read. Bar none.

In awe,

David Groenewegen
1/1 Wattletree Rd.
Armadale VIC 3143
Australia

Yeah? Cool. Mine's still 'The Dream of a Thousand Cats' by Neil, Kelley and Malcolm.

★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

"Wow" — to start off this letter in my usual way. I read issue #183 recently, and loved it tremendously — the reasons why (apart from the usual: great artwork, great ideas, etc.), I hope to explain in the rest of this letter.

I can amuse myself no end by combining the ideas you express in *Cerebus* with ideas of Neil Gaiman. For example, your and Neil's ideas of stories. Stories lead into darkness. There is significance in coincidence, and that search for significance is from where our stories come. Neil wrote in *Books of Magic*:

For there are only two worlds — your world, which is the real world, and other worlds, the fantasy . . . They give your world meaning. They do not exist; and thus they are all that matters . . .

In a world without God (for God could not logically exist from the moment Descartes imagined a world of matter, brute and stupid, devoid of spirit (digression — I now believe Descartes was the single greatest creator of our mechanistic, godless world; Newton's brilliance lay in his ability to keep God and spirit in a story which, by its very definition, rejected God and spirit)) . . . In a world without God, stories are the only things which truly matter. Leading into the darkness. In a world without God, what matters is finding patterns in the random; what matters is finding stories. And these stories (two sides of the same coin) in turn define our reality.

I hope I explained myself in a manner which makes some sense. That passage I quoted from *Books of Magic* has become one of the most powerful ideas that have ever shaped my life. Issue 183 provides a wonderful corollary to Neil's work. I'd hate to be premature or naively overoptimistic in predicting a "trend", but I do believe authors like you, Neil Gaiman, and Jeff Smith, whether intentionally or not, are providing the most interesting and powerful alternatives available to the "postmodern" rut of literature, critical theory, and philosophy. Stories do not really exist; and thus they are all that matters.

Initially, I had an overwhelming desire to ask you how much of the "autobiographical" materials in the text of *Cerebus* were "real," but I managed, after much work, to make myself realize that to ask that question is to miss the whole point — there is no "real" apart from the story, merely different stories from which to choose. I am tempted when confronted by such relativism to mention Popper's theory of disconfirmability; but

lately I am starting to believe that even Popper's theories are just a logical extension of this particular mechanistic story, which humanity has been telling itself for the past three hundred years.

As usual, when I read *Cerebus*, I made a mental checklist: Wow, cool idea; hmmm, interesting, but I reserve judgement; dubious. When I first read that "power over others is just an illusion, you can only have power over yourself," I initially filed that idea somewhere on the dubious end of "interesting." "Try telling a black man being beaten by a bunch of white trash that they're not exerting power over him," I thought. I filed the thought away and went about my life.

Then, today, I'm cleaning my apartment and thinking about random shit. I have had political ambitions for some time; I would like to do what I can to make things better for people. I am reading the newspaper, letters to the editor. Every letter, every day, is just a useless string of media-filtered, regurgitated sound-bites. And I think to myself that the only thing worse than people living their lives based on this nonsense is for something important and profound to catch on. Because I know that, within a month, anything true and beautiful would be warped unrecognizably into a gross mockery of its original intent. Not only would the idea become warped, but it would also become useless — everyone would have heard the argument and would be either bored by it or would think of something foreign to the original point. And then I think, "AARGH! I've just thought long and hard to realize something which Dave tried to tell me months ago!"

I have just discovered the much ballyhooed joys of slack. I quit my job at the university press — disappointing to find out that such good books are produced by such small minds. Now I work only as much as I need to pay the rent, and spend the rest of my time doing more important things. I'm learning Latin (way bitchin' language), reading, and trying to write. With a little luck, I will be attending the University of Wisconsin-Madison this fall, starting a Ph.D. in History. I have recently decided that I enjoy good history writing as much as good fiction (History is one of the Muses, after all). Given what I've heard about Madison, I hope I

shall be able to find some *Cerebus* fans there (very few here in Baltimore, blech).

Best wishes — love what you're doing.

Sincerely,

Mark J. Russell
3120 Saint Paul Street, #F313
Baltimore, Maryland
USA 21218

Madison, from what I remember of it — and judging by my mail — is one of the great slack centers of North America. Who knows what you'll turn into now?

★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave:

Never-had-good-enough-reason-to-write-you-even-after-eleven-years-'cause-you-never-made-me-mad-enough-oh-hell-who-am-I-kidding-I-was-just-lazy.

There. That's out of the way.

So, Dr. Sim, another fiendish experiment, pinning us to your wall like a butterfly collection 20,000 strong. Reminding us once again that, yes, indeed, we are a bunch of hard-core addicts, and you — and only you — have the keys to the medicine cabinet.

I can only guess from my own writing experiences how you must have felt writing the last two pages of #183. But I would guess it was incredibly fucking sweet.

Enough. Hurt me some more. Maybe I'll learn something.

Jason Warburg
3630 Los Alamos Way
Sacramento, CA
USA 95864

It was pretty satisfying, but the overwhelming thought was 'three down, three to go'. Finishing 186 I THOUGHT would be 'incredibly fucking sweet'. It was, if you call hatching out of a fifteen-year-old shell 'incredibly fucking sweet'.

★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave:

So, I screwed up on my Westfield order form and forgot to check off issue 183, right? Oh, well, these things happen. Now, I really beat myself up when I do this because, around here, finding a stray issue of *Cerebus* is not easy. If you don't have the retailer pull it for your hold box ... one is S.O.L., pal.

Anyway, I turn yesterday into the "holy grail" search of Nashville looking for 183. Nothing overly

special, y'know, I just hate to miss an issue. I mean, as far as action in the graphic section, this fight sequence is moving at its own leisurely pace. What was I really going to miss if I had to wait for the Chicago Convention to track one down?

And I'd been thinking about that fight and its pacing a lot in the past few months. Applying conventional graphic storytelling logic to the recent issues of *Cerebus*, a foolish and dangerous practice, it seemed to me that this fight could last until ... about #200. That would make sense. Big gate-house turn for the four-and-a-half-year home stretch. And I'd been thinking about how intense and damaging this battle was turning out to be. Would it be intense enough to be fatal? Then, something struck me. Could you kill the title character one hundred issues from the completion of the series? Once upon a time, I'd have said "no" without a second thought. But, hey, let's face it, how long had it been, prior to the events of *Mothers & Daughters*, since *Cerebus* had really been driving (or carrying) this story? It seemed possible that you could make this happen.

(An aside — my wife suggested that you could bump off *Cerebus* in 200, and then make 201 to 300 a "Young *Cerebus*" prequel.)

And this *Reads* business, what was the deal here? The narrative shift from Palnu to today was cool, but was this just some name-dropping, egocentric bullshit ... or some rather insightful material from the only creator in comics who seems to be on a first-name basis with his *total* readership. If it's the latter, then Mr. Davis has a right to feel the confident mastery over his audience that he's espousing.

Anyhoo, these were the thoughts in my mind as I drove around yesterday searching for what, I assumed, would be an uneventful issue 183.

I found a copy, you devilish bastard.

I won't lie to you that "it all makes perfect sense now", but wherever we're going from here will be more of a roller-coaster ride than anything we've taken together in quite the while.

If we're really closer to the finish line than expected, let me say congratulations on the finest piece of work in the history of the medium. If we're not that close to

the end, then this was a really shitty prank to pull on us, you dick.

Ken Rhodes
Nashville, TN

You should know by now that shitty pranks are the stock in trade of us dicks.

★★★★★★★★

That night, Viktor Davis decided that *Cerebus* would not run for three hundred issues. He decided that *Cerebus* would run for two hundred issues. Viktor Davis decided to keep this a secret, telling no one for fourteen years.

He would not announce it until issue one hundred and eighty-three, a year and five months before the end: November 1995.



The reader felt the ground jolt once, like the cheap linoleum floor of a kitchen when a big glass bottle of grape juice falls from a grocery bag. The reader's head snapped back a bit, eyes wide, but with mouth already widening in a smile. The reader laughed out loud (however inaudibly to Viktor Davis) at the sheer audacity of the path the red dot sometimes dared to take over the featureless landscape of narrative potential. Silenced and generic, the reader's feet nonetheless pressed against the surface of the void: felt it to be a new surface altogether, perhaps a half-inch lower than the previous one, and slightly more resilient. Bouncy. Head shaking in laughter, the reader contemplated the words of Viktor Davis. It could be true, thought the reader. That would mean that, at this rate, *Cerebus* could die in this battle. Viktor Davis says that Alan Moore says that all stories are true. Or, thought the reader, they are neither true nor false until the last possible instant. Why decide? "In a minute there is time / For decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse." The reader released these borrowed words, silently, like a puff of smoke in response to Viktor Davis' cigarette. The reader wafted the cloud of words in the general direction of the red dot, which the reader now saw to be jogging and waving some distance along, like the taillight of a motorcycle on a bumpy road. With a glance back at the place which had illuminated *Cerebus* and Cirin fighting (those wingbacks looked a shitload more comfortable than

this wire patio-chair), the reader hurried to catch up.

Joel Sparks
P.O. 41026
Bethesda, MD
USA 20824

Good one.

★★★★★★★★

Hello, my friends,

It is Thursday morning and for the first time in weeks the sky is clouded, friends are coming over . . . that figures. The law of Murphy in direct application, it is after all the first holiday in weeks.

As I sit here, on my left I can see a foot-high pile of comics that just arrived from Montreal. Three years ago, when I left for Europe, I arranged a system with Claude, the owner of Nebula (the best comic-book shop in Québec) to have the good adult books sent over to me regularly. This package was 10 months' worth of books! The shipping cost doubles the prices of the book, but in this island of French culture it's worth it.

Some say I should have them imported through England — cheaper — but Claude is a wonderful man and he has, like me, tried for years to promote young artists. I buy all mini-comics and some other stuff like *Drawn & Quarterly* just to help start artists. Somehow, I felt special when I received Joe Matt's first *Peep Show*. When I entered Claude's shop for the first time and enquired about the small amount of titles on the wall, he answered, "I don't sell *Marvel* or *DC*; if you want them, go someplace else (he does make exceptions for those fantastic Brits' titles)".

It actually felt wonderful calling you and Gerhard friends (almost forgot Linda!). Back when I was a student, there were some months where it was a battle between buying food or *Cerebus*. Serge (my best friend) and I had our special definition of happiness. It consisted of the latest *Cerebus* issue, 4 Oreo cookies, a glass of cold milk and the second part of Tchaikovsky's *1812 Overture*. Today things have changed. I work trying to repair France's nuclear power plants. (Before you ecologists go into huge rhetoric, my job consists of finding ways of reducing liquid waste dumped into the environment. I now know more about the subject, and in any debate I can support the

ecologist's views. The object in my head has only reinforced my anti-nuclear opinion, but if things have to be done, and there is nothing I can do about that, might as well be by me, and that way I know what happens and I can see it's done properly.)

Saying *Cerebus* is wonderful, a masterpiece, is an understatement. Letters that find poetic and funny ways to claim to the sky the quality of your work are legion. I, being French-Canadian, cannot write in the tongue of Shakespeare with sufficient eloquence to truly display my admiration for *Cerebus*. After being dipped into European culture, rediscovering Enki Bilal's work, your baby is the only part of my Canadian heritage I truly miss and have felt prouder and prouder about. It is funny how, for me, there are still only a handful of products I import from Canada: Coffee, Cereal and *Cerebus*.

Every letter has a purpose, hidden for some indeed, but a purpose. Mine is simple but must be correctly brought or it will fail to be understood.

Cerebus, I don't think I have to tell you, has an important part of "second degree" humour, as they call it here. It also has an abundance of drama and human insight (*Jaka's Story* is the only comic my wife has ever loved). I have followed your work like a boat follows the river. I, like some other adult readers, take the work as a whole. In any construction there can be one or two rooms that fail to catch the eye, but without them, the construction would fall or it would simply not be the same. Touching the slightest part of a whole is sacrilege when you appreciate it in this light.

For the person who has studied Voltaire, he knows deep down that some phrases may not be the best, but Voltaire wrote it and he must be respected. I understand that every page falls into a certain social context. You have to interest the masses in order to keep your work going strong, and in the process they might learn something (your message about death in *Melmoth* touched me very deeply, it actually moved me in ways only literature can). The present mix of second and first degree is, as usual, gorgeous. The movements in the general direction of the book keeps me from losing interest and only a few writers can accept to change a winning solution in future anticipation.

Garfield never evolved, Calvin never bought a second pet, Snoopy is simply Snoopy. Sad but so. All this is to explain how some truly understand exactly what you do and will remain along whatever direction the river takes.

I have a secret dream, buried deep in my heart, that I will take to my tomb. I would have loved to have true artistic talent, like Salieri in the movie *Amadeus*. I have some drawing talent but my heart hurts every time I open a truly magnificent comic. I touch every curve, breathe at every shading Gerhard does, and my heartbeat rises at every word I read. For me your work is special, very special.

I have found a personal way to calm somewhat this deep need. On my wall I have several pages of original art and one is by you. I don't know, a copy is just a copy but an original brings me that much closer to being a true artist. Stupid? Open eyes dreaming . . . I understand truly why some would pay a million dollars for a certain painting; if I had the money, I would not hesitate to buy one of your colour covers. I would not want to brag, but I have just too much taste. I feel bad, almost ashamed at my own work. I know it takes years and years of work to become a master, but, like in *Amadeus*, Salieri knew it was worthless; intelligence brings realism. Sad!

Looking at an original Denis Beuvais hurts, seeing Bilal sign hurts and seeing a picture of you or Gerhard having fun hurts.

I feel stupid saying this, but I am almost scared to look at the back cover of each issue. It spoils the perfect object. The letters are not the same; I can decide to read them or not (usually not). Your answers are there for the taking if we want, but the pictures are always seen. Don't get me wrong. I am not one of the maniacs; life is wonderful and *Cerebus* is just one of these small pleasures. The pictures are only pictures, after all, but if *Cerebus* is to take a special place in the reader's heart, it can also hurt.

I ask politely, and if several others out there join me in asking, you might change something that is not part of the main work. I also realise that for every person like me there are a hundred who enjoy the pictures and it would not be correct to impose or ask whatever on anybody. It's just my opinion; I give it freely and don't

expect any response.

In any case, I have to go, the sun is out, on the sea there are crisp white triangular sails that can be seen from here and they have opened our swimming pool last week; let's go and see if France's reputation of one-piece bathing suits still survives this year's fashion.

As number 6 would say: "Be seeing you!"

Continue. I am there for as long as my body and my mind will allow it.

Alain Villeneuve
120 rue du Cdt Rolland,
Studio n°1
Les Jardins de Thalassa, 13008
Marseille, France

P.S. I was sad to miss every deadline when you decided to sell some art. My wife preferred to go to India than to buy a cover; sadly I can understand that.

P.P.S. When I left I was only missing 15 original comics (ranging from 1 to 25); since it's impossible for me to get them here and Nebula does not do back issues, would it be possible to get someone's number to start once more the quest for the perfect collection?

Merci. You've got a bit of a 'breather' with the World Tour, but I'm afraid the back cover photos *will* be back and I'm afraid I'll be having fun in most of them. Just waiting on one of Kevin Eastman, Simon Bisley and me on a pontoon boat the weekend of the premiere party for the *Melting Pot* exhibit at Kevin's Words and Pictures Museum. Now *that* was a good time.

★★★★★★★★

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**HAIRBAT: HOME SWEET HOME.
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Very Micky

A CEREBUS PREVIEW

November 22, 1960.

No, that's not a typo. Tuesday, November 22, 1960, Norman Mailer, Hipster, rising star in the literary firmament, co-founder of *The Village Voice*, author of 'The White Negro', was arraigned in a New York City district court for the stabbing of his first wife Adele (after exploring the possibilities of running for mayor at a party that . . . got out of hand: a mingling of the Best and the Brightest and New York street people, Mailer's own idiosyncratic vision of a Big Apple New Frontier).

The first act of violence.

Adele lived (shit, doesn't anyone know this story anymore?), but already that time period, that sensibility, was mortally wounded. Four years later, the Beatles would permanently lay it to rest.

Vicky's sixteen, see? Dressed to kill, style, panache. *Very Vicky* isn't about a revival of that hipster age, it's mostly about the surviving sensibility. Vicky dominates the proceedings, gravitating to Cris, Greggo — people who use phrases like 'never give a schmendrick an even break', terms of endearment like 'pally' and 'broad' (as in 'she's a great broad'). 'Babe' has been appropriated. Misappropriated, if you ask me. The sensibility spits on the wound and runs a few laps. Gimme a Manhattan and make it a double, Charlie. God and the Devil are in *Very Vicky*. They aren't as much a part of the 'scene' as they like to think they are, so nothing much has changed on that score. They don't 'get it', but neither does anyone else. Not 'getting it' is a

given, dig? More to the point, the central thing I'm trying to tell you (can I freshen that up for you? Naw, I didn't think so) is that they aren't 'with it'. Dig? There's nothing inside them that's 'with it' or even remembers that there's anything to be 'with'. If you asked Vicky if she 'gets it', she'd probably give you an icy little smile and shake her head. Like most people, you'd take that as a 'no'. Which it isn't. No one would ask if she was 'with it'. If you can't tell by looking, pal, you're in the wrong place. You ever see an answer in your life, just see an answer, that makes the question meaningless?

I met John Mitchell (writer) and Jana Christy (artist) for the first time in Bethesda. Maybe it wasn't the first time. Maybe it should have been. Maybe it shouldn't. I had a sip from Jana's Manhattan in a hotel bar. It all fits, you know? She had to send me the recipe 'cause all the bars that have them on file cards, the typing has faded so bad . . . well, you get the idea.

Their publishing company is called 'Meet Danny Ocean'.

Kookoo.

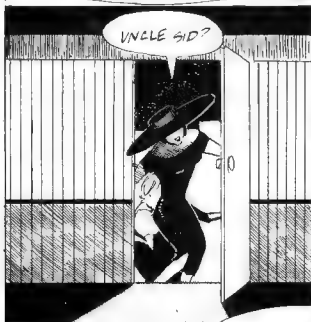
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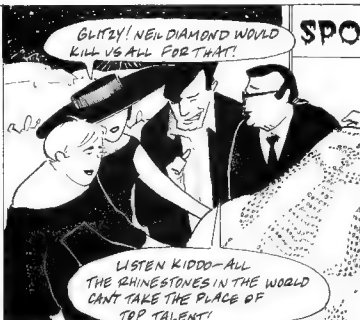
Here's looking up your address.



















ADDRESS TO DRAGON CON TRADE EXPO

JULY 14, 1994

I'd like to thank Ed Kramer and the staff of Dragon Con for inviting me to speak to you today.

On many occasions, when I do a signing in a comic-book store, the owner or manager will ask me for a critique of his store before or after the event, welcoming any suggestions as to how it might be improved.

It is, of course, very easy to criticize someone else's efforts when your own livelihood doesn't depend on the outcome. Most of you have any number of customers who are convinced that they could do a far better job of running the store than you do. I know enough about comics retailing from observation and discussion to realize that, just like writing and drawing a monthly comic book, it's a lot harder than it looks. So I am usually very hesitant to make any substantial criticisms, mindful as I am of the number of 'givens' there are to maintaining the day-to-day operations of a store.

Here, however, for what it is worth, is what I feel safe in saying about ninety-five per cent of the stores that I've been in.

Comic-book stores, in my view, are entirely too cluttered. There are simply too many things to pick from. The net effect of walking into the average comic-book store is sensory overload. I find that I can't shop in the average comic-book store — that is to say, I can't browse in search of things I'm interested in. There are so many things that I'm not interested in that my mind starts to wander. I find the same thing is true of knickknack shelves in antique stores or flea markets. I can look through a small display of a dozen or so knickknacks and determine if there is anything I want. A six-foot-by-two-foot shelf crammed with inch-high figurines and miniatures simply defeats me. There might very well be a knick-knack of some kind in there that would interest me, but it's a case of not being able to see the tree for the forest.

Now, I'm not sure there's very much that can be done about this. Any argument with a retailer about eliminating titles tends to go around and around in circles. Retailers point out to me that they have to carry everything. I point out to them that they *don't* carry everything. They point out that they *try* to carry everything. I point out that they *can't* carry everything. They point out that they *want* to carry everything. I repeat that they *can't* carry everything. They respond that they *try* to carry a *little bit* of everything. I point out that a

little bit of everything is *not* everything. They usually agree and change the subject.

I find that comic-book stores are very much like comics distributors in microcosm. They do some things very well and other things very badly, all the while maintaining that they do everything very well. Comics stores do super-heroes very well. They also do the top five or six companies very well. Everything else they do badly. 'We really push the independents' is a catch phrase that I hear all the time. It's the New Thing To Say. This usually means that they sell a lot of Ultraverse and Dark Horse comics and they have a copy of a six-month-old issue of *Hate* and issues two and four of *Bone* on a rack in the rear of the store next to the unsold copies of *Wizard* and *Hero Illustrated*. In most comic-book stores, there are six comic-book companies: DC, Marvel, Image, Valiant, Malibu and The Independents. Since that last company puts out about four hundred titles a month, it's no great surprise that it is not well represented in most comic-book stores. To even confront the *idea* of the scope and size of the options available outside of those top five companies is to stare into the Abyss. There is no doubt that no store can carry everything. And this brings me to the point of what I want to talk about today.

If you try to do everything, you will do a good job on *some* things and a bad job on *most* things. I think what stores have to do, what retailers have to do, is to decide exactly how much they can do and to stop trying to do more than that. If you try to do everything, you will do a good job on *some* things and a bad job on *most* things. You will also burn yourself out, working fourteen-hour days six and maybe seven days a week. If you're going to put that much of your time, energy and attention into something, I believe you are better served by devoting that time, energy and attention to doing a fixed number of things very, very well.

Basically I'm going to rephrase that a few times because I'm addressing two parts of your personality: the part of you that wants to carry everything and the part of you that wants to do everything *well*. I'm suggesting to those two parts of your personality that it is time for either an amicable or hostile divorce based on irreconcilable differences. I'm asking you to step back and take a look at what I'm saying and to realize that the two viewpoints are incompatible. You can't carry everything. You acknowledge this. I'm asking you

to look at the implications of that truth. How much can you carry and still do a good and thorough job with it? Let's use Peter Bagge as an example. In most of your stores, you'll have a couple of copies of the latest issue of *Hate* on an independents rack. You'll have an assortment of back issues bagged and boarded in your back-issue bins. A #9, a #11, three copies of issue 15. If you're a store that genuinely does 'push the independents', you might have a copy of the *Hey, Buddy!* trade in with your trade paperbacks and hardcovers. Now, if you look at a Fantagraphics catalogue, or the ad on the inside back cover of *Hate*, you'll see that there's a great deal more Peter Bagge material available than you have in your store. Relative to Peter Bagge, your store is not doing a very good job. This is not a criticism. It's perfectly understandable.

At this point you're getting defensive, I can tell. You're thinking, 'My warehouse never has any copies of *Hate*, *Hate* just doesn't sell very well for us, I only have so much money in my budget to spend.' Let me put it another way. Do you know how many copies of *Hate* you have in your store? Do you know if you are sold out of the trade paperbacks? Do you know how long you've been sold out of the trade paperbacks? Do you know what back issues you have available of *Hate* and *Neat Stuff*? Do you know how many *Hate* subscribers you have?

Again, this is not a criticism. What I'm trying to point out is that you have so many things to keep track of that you're not doing a good job with a lot of them. You can find out all of the information that I asked about. You have it in your cycle sheets; you have employees who could go and count the back issues, writing down the numbers and quantity, who could check the trade paperback shelf and tell you if the copy of *Hey, Buddy!* is still there or if it's gone. If it's gone, they probably couldn't tell you how long it's been gone, but they could narrow it down to a two-week span if they thought about it. Even if you did this for Peter Bagge, I could ask you the same question about Rick Veitch, Teri Wood, Colleen Doran, Robert Crumb, Matt Wagner, Frank Miller, Dave McKean, etc., etc. I could probably list fifty comic-book creators without taking a breath and it would take you and your staff a week or ten days to get all of the information together and another two weeks to bypass the distributors and order all of the books you're missing from the publishers involved. It would probably cost you the equivalent of your total comic-buying budget for two months to pay for them.

It just isn't possible, is it?

It would not be a very efficient use of your time or your staff's time. After all, you've got a comics store to run. You've got to get your monthly order together, bag and board the unsold super-hero comics, get your super-hero returns counted, boxed up and out to the warehouse, place reorders that you never get, figure out what books you're going to put in your quarter bin.

The Direct Market is getting bigger and bigger and

bigger. Every month you have a hundred more options of what to put in your store. If you can't carry everything, you are at least determined to carry *almost* everything. If a customer places an order for a book that you're sold out of, you will at least go through the motions of trying to get it for him or her, placing a reorder that won't be filled, or if it is, it'll be several months down the road when he or she has already found it somewhere else, thanks. Oh, well, stick it out on the rack. Somebody will buy it. Some day.

Whether consciously or unconsciously, the mainstream companies with the endless expansion of their lines, their mini-series, their company-wide crossovers, and all the rest of it, have created an environment where there is no time for you to think. All you can do is react as quickly as you can to the rapidly changing picture, try to limit the damage done to your store, try to keep up, and if you can't keep up, try not to fall too far behind. Keep the inventory down, keep the cash flowing, keep the shelves stocked, keep the unsold books filed in some sort of order, get your monthly order in on time, cycle the super-hero books off the shelves every week or so into the back-issue or quarter bin.

Now, supposing just for a moment that you *did* at some point, unlikely as it may sound, find time to think. What is it that you could think about that would make any difference?

First of all, you would need information. Most stores have plenty of information, but they usually don't have it in any form that would tell them anything. I'd start with 'where the money comes from'. I'd make a list of the things that bring in the most money. Which are the steadiest sellers. At this point in time, I think *Sandman* trade paperbacks and Magic cards would be at or near the top of the list. I think it's important to know *specific* things that are profitable. If, instead of *specifically* listing '*Sandman* trade paperbacks' and 'Magic cards', you wrote 'DC comics' and 'trading cards', you would be looking at information, but it wouldn't be telling you anything. There are profitable DC comics and trading cards and there are unprofitable DC comics and trading cards. In order to improve your store's profitability, you have to separate the wheat from the chaff. You also have to realize that wheat often becomes chaff and chaff often becomes wheat.

Whatever the most profitable items are should be stocked in depth and should be given the most amount of display space. *Sandman* trades bring in more money for the amount of space they take up than just about anything you can name. They should, as a result, have more display space than anything else. They should be at the front of the store.

Let's say that you make up a list of the fifty most profitable things in your store. Or twenty. Or thirty. Whatever. Now you can take the list and match it up against how your store is laid out. How much space do the most profitable items take up? Where are they located?

Dividing up your comics budget according to company is, to me, foolhardy. Instead of cutting your orders on Marvel comics and increasing your orders on DC comics, you should look at which comic books sell the best, regardless of publisher. There are stores that can sell a hundred copies of *Cerebus* and there are stores that sell three copies of *Cerebus*. The first store should probably give *Cerebus* a lot of display space and the second store probably shouldn't carry *Cerebus* at all, apart from copies for subscribers.

It's a little unusual for a publisher to recommend that you not carry his book, as I'm sure you'll agree. I do think it is time for absolute realism in the field. Most of the stores that are in peril of going under got to that situation through wishful thinking. The time for wishful thinking is past. It's time, I think, to take a hard look at the numbers and start cutting away the fat.

You *can't* carry everything and you *don't* carry everything. Instead of straining against the confines of this truth and trying to determine how much of everything you can afford in terms of time and space, I think you would be better served to determine how little you can get away with carrying.

Now there's a radical little idea.

What if you get the information together and find out that fifty per cent of your profits are accounted for by the most profitable fifty items? What if you add in the profits from subscription files and find out that all of your monthly expenses are covered right there? After all, if you're only ordering fifty items, your monthly expenditures are going to drop substantially. Let's say those fifty items take up thirty per cent of your display space. What are you going to do with the other seventy per cent? There are any number of self-serving answers to that question. I'd recommend that you fill the space with self-published and small-press comics. Mike Richardson would recommend that you fill it with Dark Horse comics. Gary Groth would advise you to fill it with Fantagraphics books. Why don't you fill it with the comic books that you want to sell? If you're a big Peter Bagge fan, why don't you order everything of his that is available from Fantagraphics? Books, comics, posters, T-shirts, back issues. If you can't carry everything, then I think it's time to focus on something. A few somethings, so that you can keep track of when you run out.

At this point in time, ninety per cent of any retailer's analysis time, the ongoing internal debate of what to do and what not to do is taken up with trying to guess what adolescent males are going to think is 'cool' in three months.

This is so difficult that it verges on the impossible. The less interested you are as a retailer in what fourteen-year-old boys think is 'cool', the more difficult it becomes to do a good job. Some retailers are starting to come around to the viewpoint that I'm putting forward here. They are not changing their stores for the most part, but intellectually and emotionally they are beginning to

understand that if they don't care about or actively despise eighty per cent of the material they're carrying, if they don't care about or actively despise eighty per cent of their customers, then there is something seriously wrong. If you're going to actively hate what you're selling and have nothing but contempt for your clientele, there are many more lucrative forms of retailing available to you.

Assuming that you are one of these retailers, a retailer who loves the comic-book medium, who is saddened by what it has turned into for the most part, who doesn't want to quit but who is finding it harder and harder to work up enthusiasm for crawling through a telephone-book-sized catalogue month in and month out, what options are available to you?

Let's take it as a 'given' that you feel you have to carry a lot of stuff that you, personally, loathe and despise. The next time you're making up your order form, put a red dot next to any title, any product, where that isn't the case. It doesn't have to interfere with what you consider your responsibilities to your customers. That red dot is just for you. When you have the order form done, add up how much money you spend on the things with a red dot next to them and how much you spend on the rest of the stuff. You can make it as personal as you want, you can just put a red dot next to the things that you think are good or excellent, you can put it next to material that you think is the 'best foot forward' for the comic-book medium, you can put it next to material that you think would interest non-comics readers if you could find a way to expand that side of your business.

Or you could try a question mark. Most retailers have a fundamental wariness of allowing their personal viewpoint to intrude in any way in the ordering process. I don't share that viewpoint and I think you're kidding yourselves if you think your stores don't, by their nature, reflect what you believe and what you choose, but let's start with your assumption that it is customer demand that dictates what you order and what you don't order. How many pigs in how many pokes are you buying every month? Do you know the names of the writers and artists whose work you are basing your livelihood on for that month? Have you or your staff ever heard of them? Do you know who will be inking it? Do you have any samples of interior pages upon which to base your decision? Is it a new character? Is the character being modified or revamped in some way that you have no idea if it will alienate long-time readers?

Put a question mark next to it.

When you have your order form done, add up how much money you are spending on unknown, untested or inadequately described creators, titles and characters. If you are spending ten per cent of your money on material in which you have confidence and ninety per cent of your money on the mainstream 'shell game', trying to guess which of the seventy-five shells has a commercially viable comic book under it, then I think that should tell

you something.

I'm not kidding myself that you'll *do* anything about it, most of you, but at least you will have some genuine information about your store and how you are running it. Genuine information is the first step towards being able to step back and see your own personal Big Picture.

Now, what if you genuinely *want* to do something about it? I know, the idea is pretty far-fetched, but I went along with *your* assumption that *I* don't agree with, so, hey, fair's fair.

What would it take to divide your store into a Question Mark area and a Red Dot area? Assuming that ninety per cent of your order was Question Mark and ten per cent was Red Dot, I don't think you would have to move that much stuff around. Certainly with all the experimenting being done with genre racking and alphabetized racking, racking by company and racking by content, there's nothing wrong with another option. Assuming that your personal Red Dot list might be things you like personally, things you want to see do well, things you want to call attention to, doesn't it make sense to have them all in one spot so you can keep track of them? In the case of small-press or self-published titles, especially from companies like Drawn & Quarterly, Fantagraphics, Kitchen Sink, Mu Press, Caliber and the others, it is time to face the fact that you can't get any of their books on reorder. If you make a list of which titles from those companies you have confidence in, that are strong sellers for you, and/or that you want to do well, it makes sense to deal directly with the publishers of those books. There's no such thing as not being able to get a self-published or small-press title. You just can't get it from your distributor. Face it. Do something about it.

This is the crux of my argument that you do some things well and most things badly. To do well *with* and to do well *for* Peter Bagge or Dan Clowes, to do well *with* and to do well *for* Yummy Fur or Wandering Star, to do well *with* and to do well *for* Evan Dorkin or Terry Moore, it is not enough to carry a couple of extra copies of the latest issue, to have a small assortment of back issues in your bins, to have an issue two, three copies of issue six and two copies of issue eight, one dog-eared copy of a trade paperback collection.

If you have all eight volumes of the *Cerebus* trades in stock at any given time, they will be a profit center for you. If you have two copies of *High Society*, you might sell them both in the course of a year or two. In a mainstream bookstore, how many of you will buy the third part of a trilogy that looks interesting from the description on the back cover if you can't find the first two?

I repeat, you *can't* carry everything. That is not only true of the mainstream, it is even more valid when it comes to the small press and independents. If you really like *Milk & Cheese* but you think *Rare Bit Fiends*, *Bizarre Heroes*, *Love & Rockets*, *Naughty Bits* and *Cerebus* suck, then I think it is ridiculous for you to divide your time, attention

and display space six ways. Your enthusiasm for Evan Dorkin and his work is going to come through. Combined with extra display space, there is no reason that *Milk & Cheese* couldn't compete with the *Sandman* trades as your second or third largest profit center in your store. Offer subscriptions to the other five titles, give them a couple of weeks of shelf space when the new issue comes in, but put your money on what you believe in.

You *can't* carry everything and the more you *try* to carry, the worse a job you're going to do on those books, those creators, who, in *your* mind, make going into work every day worthwhile.

There are no rules anymore. None. As Larry Marder said in a recent presentation, anyone who tells you that they know what's going on in the comic-book field is either bluffing or trying to sell you something. Or both. When there are no rules, you might as well do exactly what you want. At the very worst, you'll be guessing wrong just as often as you are now, so you'll be no further behind in the game than you are now. You have to find out what works for *you* and expand *that* side of it: find out what *doesn't* work for you and *eliminate* it. No matter what you have in the Red Dot area of your store and what you have in the Question Mark part of your store, I think your goal should be to make the Red Dot area bigger and the Question Mark area smaller. This is no time for wishful thinking. If you thought it was a Red Dot and it proved to be a Question Mark, move it from one area to the other as quickly as you can. If you thought it was a Question Mark and it proves to be a Red Dot, find out where you can get more of them. If you can get them from your distributor in a week or so, fine. If you can't, find an *address*, find a *phone number* and open up the supply line. If you buy five and sell them in a week, buy ten next time, twenty, thirty. If no one else in your area has Evan Dorkin's material stocked in depth and you find that in your store there's a genuine demand, then run with it, push it through the roof. Make things happen. It's a buyer's market. Everyone, every self-publisher, every *small-press* publisher, every *mainstream* publisher has his hand out and don't kid yourself about that. In a buyer's market, the wise buyer keeps his wallet zipped until he sees some proof. If something starts to 'take off', the wise buyer is the first to get out ahead of the situation, to open up a guaranteed supply line and to keep increasing his supply until the demand is met and to recognize when the demand increases or decreases and to adjust his supply accordingly. If something that was alive and vital in your store is now dying, you're better off putting *it* out of *your* misery. It's not your job to keep it alive. A store full of dying comic books is a dying store. If the inventory in your store is mostly dying, but getting bigger, then your store has a terminal cancerous growth within it. If you don't cut it out, if you don't kill it, it will kill *you*. Before you can cut it out, you have to identify it. You have to separate the healthy side of your store from the dying side of your store and it is only by taking a hard look at the numbers, dividing them into healthy cells and cancerous

cells, one by one, on paper first and then in terms of display space, that you will be able to turn the tide of battle in your favour. Ignore the man behind the curtain — ignore the publisher name, the genre, ignore your own sentimental attachment. Each store, each retailer has to determine what is healthy and what is cancerous. There are no rules. You *can't* carry everything. If you *try* to carry everything, you will do *some* things well and *most* things badly.

All I ask is that you think about this. Take a hard look at what you are doing well and eliminate those things you are doing badly. The difference between excellence and mediocrity comes down to focus and realism. Are you focused and realistic? Or are your efforts scattered and based on

wishful thinking?

There is only one expert in your store on what is real and what isn't.

The information is there. Buried under the clutter of pie-in-the-sky promises, hype and dead inventory, there is the core, the essence of your unique contribution to the direct market, to the comic-book medium. Cut away the fat, cut out the cancer. Throw it away, give it away, take it to a landfill site, and let the essence of your store live and breathe and flourish.

You're the only one who can do it.

You're the only one who *wants* to do it. Do it *now*. Make a *start*.

Before it's too late.

KEYNOTE ADDRESS HARVEY AWARDS 1994

Good evening.

Good evening and welcome, ladies and gentlemen, to the 1994 Harvey Awards honouring excellence and achievement in the comic-book field for the calendar year 1993. These awards are voted on exclusively by members of the creative community and, by this fact, reflect in the list of nominees the *crème de la crème* of the various disciplines which are the raw materials, the spirit and the essence of the comic-book medium.

The awards are named for Harvey Kurtzman, one of the great and seminal forces in the comic-book field, who has influenced several generations of cartoonists, who has been widely hailed as the Father of the Underground Comic — though he himself preferred to be described as the Funny Uncle of the Underground Comic — and who is, indisputably, along with Art Spiegelman, Robert Crumb and a handful of others, a permanent and enduring resident in the Pantheon of the Comic-Book Avant-Garde. He was taken from us too soon. That much is certain. In attempting to find a tribute to him that was fitting, of which Mr. Kurtzman would have approved, for I am sure he is with us in spirit tonight, I regret that I was unable to secure the necessary number of whoopee cushions to accommodate everyone. I think you'll agree that it would have made for quite a twenty-one-gun salute, Harvey-Kurtzman style. Mr. Kurtzman wasn't much of a one for applause, so I'll just say thank you. Thank you, Harvey Kurtzman, for Superduperman, 'Big If', *Frontline Combat* and all of your other great and irreplaceable works.

I'd also like to thank Larry Lankford and Paul McSpadden for giving the Harvey Awards a good

home. Them, them you can applaud like crazy; they deserve it. Stand up, guys.

Last and certainly least, I would like to introduce myself, your nominee this year for Most Overdressed Cartoonist, Dave Sim. *[I wore my tuxedo.—DS]*

Two years ago, I was in the midst of an eleven-month, twenty-six-city Tour of the United States. Although it was quite a juggling act, I managed to maintain my half of the workload on *Cerebus* as well as a breakneck, every-other-week schedule of store signings, media interviews and Sunday conventions. As you can well imagine, this required a regimen of 'early to bed, early to rise', the modest and oftentimes non-existent consumption of fermented beverages, exercise and other responsible behaviours seldom, if ever, associated with the name Dave Sim either before or since.

This discipline served me in good stead until the third week of August when I found myself in the great city of Atlanta, Georgia. The phone rang in my hotel room around midnight. It was, of course, Bob Burden *[At this point there was a wave of laughter. I asked the audience to please not 'get ahead of me'.]*, who I am certain will one day be the recipient of an award for Most Legendary Creator of a Comic Book that Hardly Ever Comes Out.

'Dave,' said the voice on the phone, 'it's Bob. What's up, cowboy?'

'Uh, I'm sleeping, Bob,' I said.

'Sleeping?' Bob said. He couldn't have sounded more surprised if I had said I was stitching together a quilt for the big church social on

Sunday. 'Gigi and I just got back from San Diego and we were wondering if you wanted to go out for a drink.'

Under ordinary circumstances, I would have replied, 'I'm still breathing, aren't I?' But, alas, this was the 1992 U.S. Tour — eighteen cities down and eight to go. There was a principle at stake, a personal challenge I had set for myself and which I had been able to maintain for seven months with a little less than four months to go. Clearly, I would have to forgo momentary pleasure for the larger and richer satisfaction of 'staying the course'.

'I'll be downstairs in five minutes,' I said.

Bob was already in the lobby when I got there, having mastered, in his spare time, many ancient and forgotten mystical disciplines used to transport late model four-door sedans through crosstown traffic in contravention of most known laws of physics, much to the collective dismay of the Metropolitan Atlanta Police Department and the Executives of the Traffic Authority, who have been unable, as a result of Mr. Burden's otherworldly invocations, to synchronize the traffic lights anywhere in the Atlanta area since the late 1970s.

I met Gigi, a buxom brunette who had abandoned her quest to find the role of subatomic particles in irregular variances being experienced in theoretical applications of the marginalised hypotheses attached to the field of quantum physics, to labour instead, in the service of Terpsichore, the Muse of Dance, and the unnamed Muse of Taking Your Clothes Off to Loud Music. We adjourned to her place of employment, an establishment which tilted uneasily upon the line of demarcation which separates a supper club from a juke joint much favoured by both Mr. Burden and certain individuals in the import-export trade (though for different reasons), populated as it is by 'characters' with names like Jimmy No-Nuts, Eightball, the Nostril and Clam-Face. In the time-honoured ritual known to those of us who frequent such centers of high culture, Bob bought me a table dance, summoning a nubile, almond-eyed redhead with the merest arch of a single eyebrow, a feat for which he is well and justly known throughout the semi-uncivilised world.

In mere moments, an exquisite specimen of the genus *gluteus maximus* was circling, enticingly, above my mid-section in the same slow, concentric rhythm which is favoured, I am told, by snake charmers in the ancient cities of the Middle East. The creative mind and the surprising connections it draws between disparate elements is, of course, inexplicable even to itself. I was, therefore, not as surprised as you might suspect when Bob, regarding the sinuous contortions of my *fille fatale*, leaned across the table and said:

'That reminds me. You won the Harvey Award.'

'That's great, Bob,' I said, reluctantly tearing my eyes away from the anatomical Disneyland gyrating before me. 'Which one?'

'The one you were up for,' Bob replied.

'I was up for five of them, Bob,' I said.

'Oh,' said Bob, swirling the remnants of his rum and coke, peering at the ice cubes as if he might be able to divine the answer from the shape of their corners. 'Well,' he said, finally, 'you won one of them.'

Approximately five o'clock in the morning, some two weeks or so after the ceremony itself, a note slid under the door of my hotel room. 'Best Cartoonist 1991,' it read, 'congratulations.' I felt only a little sympathy for the night clerk who had doubtless been roused from slumber by a voice which dictated the simple message and which, if I know Bob, then advised him, 'Keep your eye on the donut, cowboy.'

I'd like to thank Bob for accepting the award on my behalf two years ago and add, parenthetically, that if any recipient of an award is not here tonight, it would be a nice gesture if one of their friends could give them a call after the ceremony from one of the pay phones outside . . . collect. I'm sure they won't mind the toll charge one bit.

Leaving aside my personal experience with the Harvey Awards, I would like to make a more general observation about awards themselves. In 1951, Orson Welles had entered his film *Othello* in the Venice Film Festival. It was one of thirty candidates for the prestigious Lion of St. Mark Award. All 1200 seats of the Palais Festival had been booked for the screening. The print arrived from Rome the morning of the scheduled premiere. Welles screened it privately that afternoon and found the print to be entirely inadequate. The sound wasn't synchronised properly, the images were overly dark and murky and the editing had been done contrary to Welles' directions. Mere hours before the film was to be shown, Welles called a press conference, attended by close to a hundred critics and journalists, and announced, in both English and Italian, that he was withdrawing *Othello* from the competition. He explained that he would not risk his own reputation and the film's chance for success on a print which was in such a deplorable state.

'Why don't you just show the print to the working journalists in a special screening?' one of the reporters asked. Welles declined. A fair amount of complaining was heard. Someone suggested that a vote be taken by all assembled to see whether they would want to privately see the rough cut. The group began to grow surly.

Welles raised his hand and said, 'We must for the moment forget the democratic principle of the majority vote. In this case I am a small fortress and I will hold out.'

He stuck by his decision, even though, in the context of a film festival, he doubtless found himself on shaky ground. For what else is a film festival but the personification of the democratic impulse, that Art submit itself for the judgement of its merit relative to other works of art? Since journalists and critics traditionally play a significant role in that judgement and the process leading to it, Welles was most certainly flouting the spirit of the law, if not the letter of it.

Relative to art, leaving aside Welles' qualification of 'for the moment' and 'in this case', I believe his answer enunciated a great truth. 'We must forget the democratic principle of the majority vote. I am a small fortress and I will hold out.'

The issue really comes down to one of perception and the differences of perception between those who feel that objective truth is achieved through the exercise of the democratic principle of majority vote and those who feel that each individual makes up his or her mind about relative merit. In my view, each application of the democratic principle to the judging of art comes down to the specious comparison of apples and oranges. Who are we to judge the relative merits of 'The Dream of a Thousand Cats' as compared to 'Master Race'? 'The Golden Helmet' relative to 'A Velvet Glove Cast in Iron'? The superiority of *Watchmen* to *Signal to Noise* or vice versa? Individually as creators, as fans of the comic-book medium, we decide these things as an ongoing, internal debate. For a creator an influence becomes internalised and merges with our idiosyncratic sensibility, our subjective preferences in style, execution and technique.

Although I haven't always seen it this way, I've been very fortunate that *Cerebus* has always been a marginal part of the comic-book world, whether critically or commercially speaking. I have had many friends over the years who have had to labour under a far greater burden of popularity and high expectations than I have. I have seen writers and artists develop large creative blocks attributable to adulation, acclaim and wealth that could only be described as 'too much too soon'. The younger they were, the more likely this was to occur. There was no malice intended by the comic-book community — quite the opposite — but the effect on them as people and, more importantly to me, as creators was a negative one. Since these are awards which are voted on by creators, I hope you'll all indulge me in addressing this issue just for a moment.

In the seventeen years that I've been doing *Cerebus*, both I and the book have been 'sort of popular', 'somewhat unpopular' and 'very unpopular' [laughter]. Sometimes very, very unpopular [laughter]. To quote Bob Burden once again, 'I've been around the block so many times I feel like my turn-blinker got stuck.' It took me a number of years to figure out what was outside of me and what was inside of me. It took me even longer to develop the ability to ignore what was

outside of me and pay attention to what was inside of me. I am gratified by coverage in nationally circulated magazines, good reviews, good fan mail, extravagant compliments, awards, being included in various top 20, top 50 and top 100 lists, being courted by Hollywood, being interviewed by the fan press and all the rest of it. But I keep all those things and the gratification they create in me in a little box clearly marked 'Not To Be Taken Seriously'. At the end of the day, all that can be said is I finished page eight of issue whatever. And that means page nine still has to be done. As Truman Capote so eloquently put it, 'The dogs howl but the caravan rolls on.'

I mention all this merely as a cautionary note, and of course it is intended primarily for the younger nominees in the audience and the would-be comic-book creators who will read this in a few months' time. I don't think if Al Williamson wins for Best Inker that he is going to show up at the next con in a gold lamé jacket with a hairdresser and bodyguard in tow. [At this point Sergio Aragones pointed to Al Williamson's son and said, 'Not true. His bodyguard is right here.'] Well, I guess I'm mistaken about that then.

In conclusion, I would like to congratulate all of the nominees in tonight's Harvey Awards. In a year where dozens, if not hundreds, of new titles have appeared to 'strut and fret their hour upon the stage', some to endure and some to fall by the wayside, a year where comic books as a medium of expression have come of age, attracting better and brighter creative talent than at any other time in the sixty-year history of this medium, a year where more of those talents have chosen to take up permanent residence, where even more talents have returned after exploring other creative opportunities elsewhere, in just such a year, 1993, there is no question that your nomination for a Harvey Award is a great honour and a testament to your abilities and your dedication.

I would also like to thank the retail and distribution communities and their representatives who are here tonight, most especially those who devote so much of their time and energy to supporting those books in the small-press and self-publishing fields. It is very much appreciated.

Most of all, thanks to the comic-book fans and comic-book store customers who have made this possible.

I'll now return you to the capable hands of our master of ceremonies, Dr. Kenneth Smith.

STRANGERS TM IN PARADISE

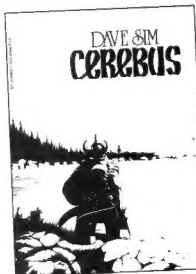
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CEREBUS: THE FIRST HALF



CEREBUS reprints Cerebus 1 to 25
500 pages \$25

The Cerebus volume introduces the cast of characters including Elrod the Albino, Red Sophia, Jaka, the Cockroach (later Captain Cockroach with Elrod as Bunky the Albino), Lord Julius, President Weisshaupt and many more.

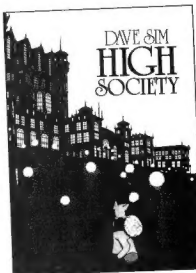
HIGH SOCIETY reprints Cerebus 26 to 50
500 pages \$25

Cerebus gets swept up into the world of high power politics in Iest and runs for Prime Minister. Introduces Astoria, Filgate, Blakely, the Regency Elf, Dirty Fleagle and his brother Dirty Drew McGrew, Duke Leonardi. The Roach becomes Moon Roach and Sergeant Preston of the Royal Mounted Iestian police.



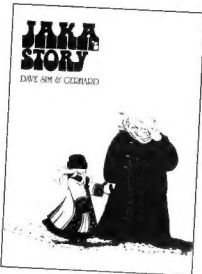
CHURCH & STATE Vol. I & II reprints Cerebus 52 to 111
1200 pages \$30 ea.

One of the longest single stories in the history of comics. Manipulated by President Weisshaupt, Cerebus finds himself married and then finds himself as Pope of the Eastern Church! Introduces Mrs. Henrot-Gutch (Cerebus' mother-in-law), Boobah, Bear, Bishop Powers, Bishop Posey, Mick and Keef and many more. The Roach becomes Wolveroach and the Secret Sacred Wars Roach. Also, in volume II, is the Flaming Carrot cross-over.



JAKA'S STORY reprints Cerebus 114 to 136
500 pages \$25

Cerebus returns to find his life in ruins and ends up as a houseguest of the love of his life, Jaka, and her new husband Rick. Introduces Oscar the poet, Pud, the tavern-owner, and Mrs. Thatcher.



MELMOTH reprints Cerebus 139 to 150
250 pages \$17

Cerebus, mistakenly believing that Jaka is dead, takes up residence in Dino's Cafe, clutching Jaka's childhood doll, Missy and his sword. The other half of the story is a faithful retelling of the last days of Oscar Wilde. The Roach becomes normalroach. Introduces Doris, Dino, Janice, Robbie and Reggie. Cameo appearances by Mick and Keef.



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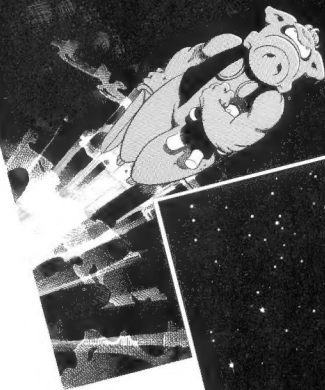


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THE SECOND HALF BEGINS HERE

FLIGHT

DAVE SIM & GERHARD



FLIGHT reprints *Cerebus* 151 to 162
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Cerebus explodes into action in the second half of the 300 issue story-line. Trapped in test, hunted by the Cirinists, *Cerebus* battles back. Featuring Punisherroach as well as the unexpected reappearance of many early *Cerebus* characters, including the first (visual) appearance of Suenteus Pol!

WOMEN

DAVE SIM & GERHARD



NEW IN '94!

WOMEN reprints *Cerebus* 163 to 174
250 pages \$17

The second half continues as Astoria and Cirin contend for the fabled Final Ascension. Features Swoon, Snuff, Sleaze, Sulk and more in the highly-acclaimed (even by Neil Gaiman!) Sandman parody, as well as virtually every female character introduced in the *Cerebus* storyline to date.

CEREBUS WORLD TOUR 1995

